

McEvony Colony Ahead of Gen. O'Neill's

Handful of Wisconsin Folk Settle Downstream from Site of City

By JOEL PARKER of O'Neill

The first settlement in this community was started when a few families known as the McEvony colony left their homes at present site of Hill Point, Sauk county, Wisconsin in the Spring of 1873, started westward, stopped and staked their tents on the Northeast quarter of section 32, township 29, range 11, West of the Sixth P. M., one mile Southeast of the present city limits of O'Neill.

The names of the families are: the H. H. McEvony, J. T. Prouty, E. H. Thompson and Frank Bitney families, Willie Bitney, brother of Frank Bitney, William Dickerson, single, friend of Frank Bitney, Jennie H. Shultz, sister of Mrs. Prouty, and Manson Tupper, relative of Mrs. McEvony. Then the Eli Sanford family decided to go with them but disposing of property and other matters kept them from starting with the colony but came the next year. McEvony promised the Sanford family a good claim would be picked for them nearby. In the Fall of 1873, Miss Julia McEvony, a girl of 16, a niece of Mr. Sanford, picked a claim for the Eli Sanford family and with a team of ponies and breaking plow broke five acres of sod for them. When her uncle came the next Spring, a good claim near by awaited them. This breaking of sod was the first known to have been done in this vicinity. The farm is now owned by Matt Beha of O'Neill.

Mrs. McEvony, Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Sanford were sisters, their maiden names being Bitney, father's name was Charlie Bitney. Frank and Willie Bitney's father's name was Peter, Charlie and Peter Bitney being brothers.

The families had no trouble in picking their claim for the reason that Mr. McEvony and two friends, Bill Inman and Mr. Inman's father in the Spring of 1871 left their home community in Sauk County, Wis., in a covered wagon to carefully look and map the valley and prairie land along the upper Elkhorn river, which had just recently been surveyed. Emigrants were already slowly pushing West of Wisner.

McEvony and the two Inmans camped at different places along the Elkhorn valley in this vicinity, one camping place was about midway between the present site of Inman, and O'Neill. They favored this particular place for themselves and for the families back home, although they visited and looked over the valley and table land farther West.

After a few days along the Elkhorn valley the elderly Mr. Inman went back home as he only wanted to see the country out West and have in mind the kind of a home his son would have. Reaching home he reported favorable locations for the claim hunters. Friends and relatives were then anxiously waiting the return of McEvony and Inman, who were to come home later in the Fall.

Bill Inman picked his claim along the Elkhorn river Northwest of the present site of Inman. He decided to stay out West, but went East a short distance to stay through the Winter months, and during the year of 1872 he built a cabin



Ed Boyle (left) and Joel Parker . . . consult old law book at site of Holt's first courthouse.

on his claim. His claim later was known as the Mrs. Cassidy farm and now is known as the Charles Boyle farm.

McEvony reached home in the Fall of '71 with interesting stories of the Elkhorn valley. Deer, antelope, prairie chickens were as easy to get as going into a farm yard for tame ones. The families above mentioned at once decided to go West, but disposing of real estate and other matters would keep them from starting West until the Spring of 1873.

In the early Spring of 1873, the families above mentioned, except the Eli Sanford family, tossed their hats in the ring, said goodby to friends and relatives and started on their journey West. In the Fall of 1872, Bill Inman already had his cabin built, and in the Spring of 1873 moved there and wanted to be prepared to welcome his friends who were coming West and intended to reach his place on the fourth of July, 1873.

On the 13th day of July, 1873, the colonists arrived at the Inman log cabin, in five covered wagons, bringing along some live stock. In this colony were the following named persons: H. H. McEvony and wife, Eliza, daughter, Julia McEvony (later known as Mrs. Byron Parker or Mrs. Julia E. Parker), sons, H. C. McEvony, who was sheriff of Holt County for several years and Joel McEvony; E. H. Thompson and wife Helen, sons, Ezra, Elliot and Sam Thompson, now of O'Neill; daughters, Ellen, Frankie and Sarah Thompson; Frank Bitney and wife Clara, daughter, Phoebe; Willie Bitney, brother to Frank Bitney, J. T. Prouty and wife, Miss Jennie H. Shultz, sister of Mrs. Prouty, William Dickerson, latest address, Atkinson, Nebr. and Manson Tupper, a relative of Mrs. McEvony.

The Eli Sanford family arrived in the Spring of 1874. Family consisted of Mr. Sanford and wife, Kate, son George,

daughters; Eliza (known as Maggie), Ella, Viola and Annie.

They intended to camp there and pick their claim. The colonist were very much disappointed when Mr. Inman told them about flood waters that occurred earlier in the Spring caused by heavy snow storms, showing them how high the water had been around his log cabin and said it was necessary for him to move to higher ground and live in a tent until the water receded and ground dried up. He was just moving back to his cabin when the above colonists arrived. The travelers, now weary and tired from their long journey, decided they wanted higher ground.

McEvony knowing the valley as he did, said he would go West up the river a short distance, the land lays much higher, on they went, came to the higher ground and they all enjoyed the sight of this location, the Elkhorn river with its clean, clear water, good fishing, was an ideal camping ground.

The pioneers now knew they had a task to do, their log houses had to be built, provisions needed for the Winter ahead. The end of a rail road was at Wisner.

They immediately started staking tents and preparing for the future, some scouting the river and country side for trees, from which to hue out logs for their cabins, others, on orders directed from the dictator shouldered the musket and pitchfork went hunting for game and fish, in a short time plenty of game and fish arrived, much to the enjoyment of the dictator who was in an angry mood, having had trouble with the salt pork barrels for several days and these hardy, hungry pioneers, carefully, gulations as to bag limit, size, observed the game and fish species and etc.

In a few days claims were located, picked in a manner

that they joined, logs were coming to camp and their cabins started. McEvony having good horses and being familiar with the country took the task of hauling supplies, others were busy building their log houses.

During trips East for supplies many homeseekers were contacted, were told of the colony starting father West along the Elkhorn river. Soon afterwards, emigrants were coming; Hoxsie and wife, two sons; Henry Hoxsie and Wilson Hoxsie, came in the month of July, 1873, in a few weeks other emigrants were here: the George Mitchell family, consisting of several children, Simon Deal, David Wisgarver, William Wisgarver, Sam Wolf and others.

Some time later in the Fall of 1873, General John O'Neill visited the community, stopped at the McEvony home, introduced himself and after a friendly visit the General had the privilege of using any of the driving horses or saddle ponies he so desired, and it was from the McEvony home and using his horses that the General made his first inspection visits of the land in this vicinity for the purpose of finding a suitable location for his colonies, which would start coming West the next Spring.

It was a pleasure for the McEvony family to have the opportunity to help the General with his difficult and tedious task and Miss Julia McEvony, daughter of Mr. McEvony, then a girl of 16, made sure her riding pony was ready for the General when he started on trips of inspection. The General stayed at the J. T. Prouty and McEvony homes during his visit.

General John O'Neill came with his first colony in the month of May, 1874, second colony, same month the next year, two colonies came later on.

In the early Spring and Summer of 1874, the Elkhorn river valley near the McEvony settlement became a regular camping ground, nearly every day different camp fires would be observed and some earlier settlers would make daily visits to have a chat and learn of any news. Different types of vehicles were seen, some drawn by oxen and some travelers came walking or riding with others.

The first Fourth of July celebration was held in this vicinity at the J. T. Prouty place of business, who had already been keeping travelers and also kept a stock of groceries and other supplies, located in the Southwest corner of section 29, township quarter of section 29, township 29, range 11, West of the 6th P. M., a few rods Southwest of the Burlington round house and Northwest across the section line from the sale pavilion at O'Neill.

This celebration took place on July 4, 1874. Sam Thompson, now of O'Neill, son of E. H. Thompson, was an eye witness to that event, says he was a small lad then, but it was a big day for him.

General John O'Neill arrived with his first colony of settlers a few weeks before, so there was no small gathering at this celebration. A flag pole was high in the air near the Prouty Place, many entertainments were on the program. A ball game was scheduled, sides had been chosen and the game went into action; scores not being rationed those days, each team entered a sizable number in the bag and the losing side had a task to do there 75 years ago.

Arrive During Celebration

(As told by Henry Grady, of O'Neill, son of John Grady)

In the early Spring of 1874, John Grady, then living at Galena, Ill., became much interested in the stories about the prairie island in Nebraska, open for settlement and that emigrants were moving in that direction in large numbers.

Mr. Grady, a young man, lately out of the Union army that fought the Civil War and, unmarried, decided to start West and choose for his destination the upper Elkhorn river valley, along the valley the railroad was likely to extend its road.

Mr. Grady left Galena, Ill., in the month of May, 1874, went down the Mississippi river by boat to St. Louis, Mo. At St. Louis he met John Mayberry, who was going West for the same purpose. They became friendly, took the course chosen by Mr. Grady. From St. Louis they went up the Missouri river to Sioux City, Ia. At Sioux City they got permission to ride a government boat up the river to Ft. Randall, S. D. From Ft. Randall they walked across country, Southwest and reached the settlement they were looking for on July 4, 1874.

The journey from Ft. Randall took several days, was somewhat tiresome and exciting. They carried with them some provisions, clothing, drinking water and a couple of six-shooters to be used for pillows at night and other purposes. The only entertainment available during the evening and long hours of the night, was when curious coyotes contacting their trail would start humming a few verses of their highly prized mystery melodies, which was not at all appealing and only to be answered for their friendly attitude with a blast from a couple of six-shooters.

After visiting a few days with the early settlers, they each located a claim for themselves. Mr. Grady choose for his location the 320 acres described as the South half of section 23, township 29, range 11, where the airport is located at O'Neill.

Mr. Mayberry's choice was the Northeast quarter of section 30, township 29, range 11, the Southwest corner of this quarter section is in the center part of the present city of O'Neill, the Golden hotel being located on this Southwest corner.

Now being satisfied with their locations, they immediately started walking across country Northeast to Niobrara City, the nearest land office to file on their homesteads; from Niobrara City they walked to Sioux City, Ia., where each purchased a team of oxen, wagon, breaking plow and a stove, then they started back to locate on their claims. The journey back took 11 days.

Mr. Grady started improving his claim immediately, went back to Galena, married in April, 1876, then with his wife came back to live on their homestead where they resided until the death of Mr. Grady in the year of 1894.

Mr. Mayberry, an experienced carpenter by trade, after resting a few days from his journey from Sioux City, with his team of oxen, began studying the homestead life; after making a couple of rounds following the oxen, hanging out the breaking plow on a small tract of prairie land and arguing and fighting the grasshoppers. The grasshopper invasion started in the year 1874, next year after the great blizzard of 1873, that started on April 10, lasted three days, and known as the second great Nebraska storm. This

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DIAMOND JUBILEE EDITION

THE FRONTIER
O'NEILL, NEB. — JUNE '49

87 Grass Varieties Form 'Grass Widow'

In 1890 there moved into the Stuart community a family by the name of Zink. Of the seven children in the family one, Miss Florence, became a prominent figure in educational circles. This included four years in the district schools of the county, five years in the Stuart schools, one year in Missouri where her pupils were the children of pupils her mother had taught in the same school, and four years county superintendent of Holt county when she brought out a complete directory of the schools of the county. This met with high favor and was commended by the state department of education.

What brought Miss Zink into wide popularity was a figure resembling a woman clothed with a dress made entirely of native grass, of which there were 87 varieties worked into the dress. While filling a place as instructor in the Rock county teachers' institute Miss Zink asked the teachers to send her bunches of grass for this purpose. It was one of the exhibits from Holt county sent to the state fair in 1906 and resulted in Miss Zink receiving hundreds of letters. After Miss Zink retired from the superintendent's office she was married and is now Mrs. Florence Downey living at 508 Rockdale Ave., Cincinnati, O. While serving as a member of the legislative committee of the state teachers' association Miss Zink was instrumental in getting a number of laws enacted beneficial to the schools.

\$34 TO \$42 PER MONTH
In 1883 the average monthly pay for women school teachers was \$34 and \$42 for men teachers.

Nebraska Represented at World's Fair in 1892

In the Autumn of 1892 William Hayden and J. T. O'Donahue, of Omaha, formed a stock company known as the Nebraska Improvement Co., and sold shares to the amount of \$20,000. The purpose was declared to be that of "presenting at the World's Fair in the most effective manner possible the scope and magnitude of the products of Nebraska."

SMOOT'S TEAM TOPS

What would a community do without the fire-eaters? An early day group of such in O'Neill was a hose team known as Smoot's Hose Team. Mr. Smoot was foreman; Jonnie Murphy, assistant foreman; John Lapham, secretary; George Triggs, first pipeman; Harry Gillespie, assistant pipeman; Tom Tierney, first pipeman in second team, and Miles Gibbons, assistant.

EVANGELIST TO IRELAND

Moody and Sankey, the noted evangelists, were in Limerick, Ireland, conducting meetings in the Autumn of 1883. In 1883 Mrs. L. G. Ficen came to O'Neill from Albert Lee, Minn., and on the evening of December 6 interested quite a crowd by her discourse on "Ink Bottle vs. Whisky Jug."

PETITION NO AVAIL

In 1892 C. C. McHugh of the O'Neill Sun circulated a petition to secure endorsement for appointment as postmaster. The appointment went to another sturdy democrat.

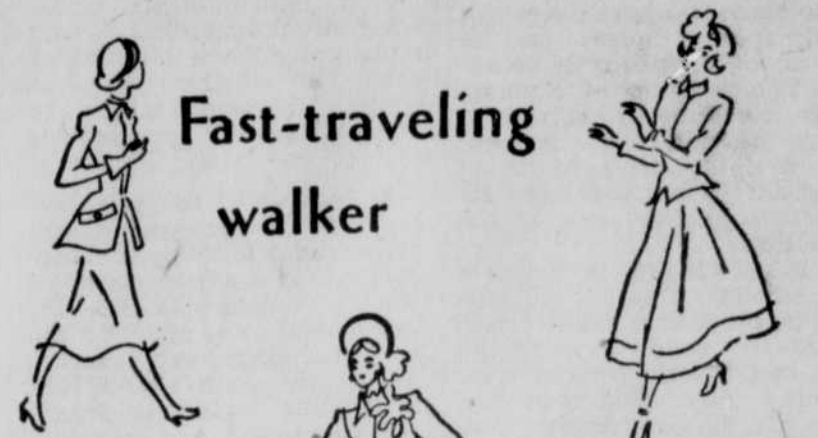
WEAVING FIRST CRAFT

Weaving may have been the earliest craft, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

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OSBORNE'S
The Family Shoe Store
O'NEILL

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SALUTE TO O'NEILL On Its 75th Anniversary

Celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of O'Neill is a time not only for recalling the past but also for looking to the future. As O'Neill enters the last quarter of its first century, it can look forward with confidence to continued progress built upon the accomplishments of the past and the progressiveness of the present.

We in the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company have a stake in that future. We have demonstrated our confidence in this city by recent investments of more than \$90,000 in enlarging our telephone building and adding substantially to facilities for both local and long distance telephone service.

Since establishment of the first telephone exchange in O'Neill in 1902, telephone service has grown with O'Neill and has contributed to its growth and development. As a public service which has gone forward with O'Neill for nearly a half century and which is keyed to keep pace with its increasing telephone needs, we are glad to have a part in this celebration of O'Neill's 75th anniversary.

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